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Forest Service Proposes Scaled-Down Mineral King Recreation Development

From a Times Staff Writer

PORTERVILLE—A scaled-down version of the controversial Walt Disney Productions recreation development at Mineral King Valley was proposed Friday by the U.S. Forest Service.

The revised plan would allow a maximum of 5,000 visitors daily—half the traffic envisioned by Disney—at the proposed ski resort in the Sierra Nevada in eastern Tulare County.

The scaling down was recommended by the Forest Service after public hearings on an environmental impact statement.

The Forest Service suggested that a village smaller than originally proposed be built, and that six to nine, instead of 18, ski lifts be constructed.

Mike Mortensson, spokesman for the Forest Service, said the agency did not rule out the possibility that the resort eventually could be developed to a capacity of 10,000 visitors daily.

But, he said, full development presently is unfeasible, considering expensive modifications that would have to be made if maximum capacity were to be allowed in the valley.

court action stemming from environmentalists' opposition to the development.

Disney officials said they could not comment on what impact the alterations would have, but Disney Vice President James Stewart said it might affect the economic feasibility of the project.

"We won't be in a position to study the feasibility of the project until the Forest Service comes up with a final land use plan and settles its litigation problems with the Sierra Club," Stewart said.

"Of course there's always the possibility that if visitor capacity is too sharply curtailed, the project will not be able to meet our economic needs and achieve the levels of public service and quality Walt Disney had hoped for."